



Warm by Fairly Odd New Yorker

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Summary: Alternate ending to It (1990) but I drew some inspiration from It (2017) and can be seen in that canon to a degree. Richie carries Eddie's body out of the caves and can't come to terms with the fact that his friend may be gone forever. Richie/Eddie pairing

1. Chapter 1

(A/N)- I couldn't deal with the ending to It (1990) and the book, so I made a new one. Hope all my fellow Reddie fans appreciate! I nearly died writing this.

Warm

Richie Tozier couldn't believe how heavy Eddie Kaspbrak felt as he carried his body across his shoulders. He still felt warm, but he assumed it must've been his own body heat. Richie could swear Eddie was only sleeping. But he saw it happen with his own two eyes, as the life left his poor friend's body. And yet, when they returned to him after defeating Pennywise once and for all, Richie expected him to be sitting upright, smiling sheepishly at them as he asked if they'd seen his glasses anywhere.

"What are we going to tell the police?"

Richie laid Eddie down by the riverside before anyone could help him. It was the first time he'd gotten a good look at his fallen friend since he'd ... he couldn't bring himself to even think it. How could he, when Eddie looked just the same as he did when he'd first laid eyes on him again after all these years, his eyebrows still creased in that look of worry, as if he were experiencing a nightmare. Richie looked to his chest, hoping in vain to see it rise and fall with each breath, but ... nothing. He remained still as if he were a painting or a photograph.

"Who says we're going to the police?"

Richie could only think of what he was supposed to tell Eddie's mother. This couldn't compare to the time he'd brought Eddie home to her with a broken arm. He'd gotten enough of an earful then, he could only imagine how furious she'd be with him now, if she was still around, anyway ... Richie hadn't bothered to ask, he never liked her much.

Ben and Beverly continued to offer up suggestions to each other, and he blocked them out. He'd almost forgotten Bill was nearby with Audra, for they were both silent as the grave.

"What do you think we should do, Eddie Spaghetti?" Richie murmured, gently playing with Eddie's golden locks, letting his hand rest on his forehead, the back of his hand as if he was taking his temperature, as Eddie would ask him to when they were kids, whenever he was worried he might be catching a fever.

Oddly enough, his forehead felt warm. Like, really warm. As if he might be ...

Richie shook his head and took his hand away, gripping handfuls of grass as he rocked slowly on his knees, "Get a grip, Richie, just because you can't believe it doesn't mean it hasn't happened ..."

He looked to Eddie's hand, lying in the dirt just inches from his own. Tentatively, he took it in his, expecting it to be cold and clammy, possibly stiff, but it wasn't. Quite the opposite, actually.

"What are we going to do with his body? I mean we can't just dispose of it-

"Guys ..."

"They're gonna ask questions-"

"Guys?"

"We could say he must've had an asthma attack-"

"GUYS!"

They silenced, and Richie could even feel Bill's eyes on the back of his neck.

"What is it, Richie?"

"Eddie's not dead."

Silence fell yet again, and he could hear Bev approach, gripping his

shoulder tight, comfortingly.

"Rich ..."

"He's still warm! If he were dead, shouldn't he be cold by now?"

"It was warm in those caves, Richie ..." Ben reminded.

"Yeah, well, it's cold out here!"

"Richie, please-

"What about rigor mortis, huh?"

"That could take hours to set in."

Bev put her hands over her ears, "Please, it's bad enough we lost Eddie, can we please not-"

"We didn't *lose* him, Bev, he's right here!"

"Richie!" Ben snapped, grabbing his friend by the shoulders and turning him around to look him in the eyes, "Stop it! Alright? We all loved Eddie too. You're not making this any easier."

"What about Bill's wife, huh? Is she dead too?"

"Richie ..." Bill warned, his first word since they emerged from the caves.

Ben pulled Richie up and away from Eddie, and that's when Richie really lost it, shrugging out of Ben's grip and pushing him away, causing him to stumble and fall onto the soft earth.

"*Richie!*" Beverly shouted, rushing to Ben's aid.

Bill had already reluctantly but gently laid Audra against a nearby boulder and stood to face his grief-stricken friend, his face hardened with anger.

"Richie ... We all know how you felt about Eddie ..." Bill said evenly, and Richie backed down, looking like deer in headlights ... or headlights.

"You gotta face this. I know it's hard. I can hardly wrap my mind around all that's happened myself. Eddie wouldn't have wanted this ... neither would Stan. You're our friend, Richie. We're here for you. Don't forget that."

Richie could feel fresh hot tears pricking at his eyes, but he refused to let them fall as he inhaled sharply, nodding his head as his eyes fell to his feet, "You're right, Bill ... you're right ... I'm sorry ... I'm sorry, Ben, Beverly ..." he gestured to them vaguely, too numb to really address anything as he turned from his friends, back towards Eddie, his knuckles to his lips as his eyes darted about, not focusing on anything for too long. Eddie, rock, tree, lake, Eddie, watch, feet ...

"Richie, maybe it's better if you come over here for a while ..." Beverly suggested, "Until we decide what to do about ..."

"Can I please just have a moment alone?"

"Richie," Bill began slowly, "I don't know if that's-"

"Please?" Richie asked, not turning around as he stood there shakily, hand fidgeting at his side as he rubbed his forehead in agitation, squeezing his eyes shut, unwillingly causing those tears that had formed to finally fall, "Let me say g- ... goodbye."

The word sounded so final, and yet so unreal, he didn't believe it himself.

"Okay, Rich ..." Bill said after a while, and his friends moved back to sit with Audra, giving him some much-needed space.

Richie fell to his knees, wiping his face in annoyance before finally opening his eyes, his gaze falling immediately on Eddie.

Maybe he was just imagining it. Maybe it was some sick last-minute joke courtesy of the old sewer clown. Maybe his regrets were just piling up all at once because it finally occurred to him that it was too late. And yet a part of him still felt like he had more time. But then that was probably just a side-effect of the grieving process, refusal to let go.

He took out Eddie's inhaler from his pocket. He had asked Ben to

grab it for him, for he still had Eddie on his shoulders at the time, and Ben had stuck it in his jacket pocket for him as per his request. Eddie's glasses too, they were in his other pocket, and he took them out as well.

"It's all your fault, Eds ... you stood up to It once before, why'd you have to do it a second time? I wouldn't have blamed you for runnin' and hidin' ..."

He clutched Eddie's inhaler tight till his knuckles turned white, "It's my fault too. I looked into the deadlights. I should've been looking at you ..."

His thoughts drifted back to what Bill had said ... 'we all know how you felt' ... what was it that he felt? He'd lost touch with Eddie, with all of them, for 27 years ...

27 years, countless failed relationships, all with women ... never married, always looking for something he wasn't sure he'd lost in the first place, or if he ever had it to begin with. He'd accepted himself as bisexual, even though he wasn't open about it, even though his only relationships have ever been with the opposite sex. He couldn't even say he was attracted to men, but he noticed Eddie. He noticed guys in his life that reminded him of Eddie. He never did anything, but he sure as hell noticed them.

He felt so foolish. He'd never even grown up with Eddie. He left Derry not long after their first confrontation with It, right after Eddie and his mother moved away. If he was being completely honest with himself, despite how much he cared for his other friends, he had left because of Eddie. But the time he'd spent with him, at least five years before everything, he knew.

At the time, he took it as fondness. His best friend was Stan, but Eddie was different. He felt this intense need to protect him. He couldn't help but tease him and ruffle his hair whenever he saw him, and it annoyed Eddie to no end, but Richie couldn't help it. He couldn't very well express his affections, so it had to come out somehow. Richie was a loudmouth by nature, he sought attention like a moth to a flame. But it was Eddie's attention he sought the most. Maybe because it should've been all too easy to get under his

skin, but Eddie learned to ignore Richie's teasing at times, which made Richie only want to try harder.

He didn't know what exactly it was that attracted him. Maybe it was Eddie's fragile nature, being so prone to sickness and always such a worry wart. He was feminine in his own way, which earned him foul nicknames and undesirable attention from classmates. Richie always had this overwhelming need to protect him, but despite his condition and small stature, he held his own more often than not. There were several occasions where Richie ran to break up a fight, only to find the bullies running in his direction, fleeing the scene as Eddie stood there screaming after them, brandishing his inhaler like it was a deadly weapon. Just as he'd confronted the clown.

"You're the bravest guy I know," Richie murmured, finally releasing his inhaler, letting it tumble off of his knee and into the dirt, trading it to hold Eddie's hand gently in his. Still warm. He was still not coming to terms, apparently.

"I could never bare my soul like that ... what you said ..." he drifted off as he recalled Eddie's confession to having been a virgin his whole life, running his thumb along his friend's knuckles. Richie had shrugged it off carelessly like it was no big deal as if he had no sympathy for the guy, but still, he expressed his feelings in his own awkward way, by placing his hand on his shoulder and gripping it tightly. What little consolation he had to offer ...

"Me and my big mouth, I could never be half as honest as you were back there. Hell, if I had, I might've saved you ..."

He had been doubting his own sexuality over the years, but there was no doubt when he saw Eddie, that old familiar flutter in his chest at the sight of his big beady eyes behind wire-framed glasses, and that quirky grin, the smile he loved so much ... things he'd never say, things he regretted now, more than ever.

Eddie had probably been the only person he ever truly loved.

Richie squeezed Eddie's hand, and he could've sworn he felt him squeeze back. It was beginning to torment him. He knew he had to leave soon.

He looked to Eddie's face, still as ever. His skin did look like it was losing some of its color, that was a good sign? Coming to terms, anyway ...

He released his hand and leaned over, brushing his blonde curls away. Eddie was still lukewarm to the touch. He could be sleeping ... The thought alone gave him some comfort. It made it easier for him not to cry.

"I love you, Eddie Kaspbrak," he murmured close, kissing him firmly on his forehead.

As he pulled away, he could've sworn he saw his eyelids flutter, but he convinced himself it was just wishful thinking.

Eddie's glasses were still in his other hand, and he placed them gently beside him, both hands now free to grasp Eddie's hand in his, and he bowed his head, content to sit in silence and hold him until the others would inevitably drag him away.

He recalled the sleepovers he'd held at his house, sometimes with the rest of the Loser's Club, but more often than not it was just him and Eddie. They'd fight over sleeping with the nightlight. Richie couldn't sleep with it on, but Eddie was dead-set against sleeping without it. Try as he might, he could never help Eddie get over his fear of the dark. But at least for a while, he distracted him for it.

Eddie would bring over his book of fairytales and ask Richie to read to him. If it had been anyone else, he would've teased them mercilessly about it. But it was different with Eddie. No one else knew this side of him, and Richie would be damned if he betrayed his trust. And so he'd read to him.

Eddie's favorite had always been Sleeping Beauty and Snow White. Richie found them all ridiculous, but he saved Eddie the criticism for fear he'd scare him off. Eddie didn't seem to care much for anything but the happy endings. Sometimes he'd have Richie skip to that part. Eddie loved magical cures. The impossible things. He was enraptured by the thought of someone kissing another, and saving them from eternal slumber, or even ... death.

"No way in hell," Richie muttered to himself with a short humorless laugh, shaking his head as he held Eddie's open palm in his, tracing lazy circles and zigzags along his skin. Still so warm, but from his own hands holding him so tight.

Daringly, his fingers traced up towards his wrist, feeling for a pulse.

If his head could literally explode, it would've done so, right then and there.

There was a pulse!

It was faint, but it was there!

His eyes widened, and he looked quickly over his shoulder at his friends, who all had their back to him as they talked quietly amongst themselves, completely unaware of what was going on.

He looked back to Eddie, and laid his head down on his chest, watching his face.

A heartbeat!

Or was it Richie's own pulse, blood rushing in his ears?

"Come on, pal, if you're still alive, why aren't you breathing?" he muttered to himself as he sat back up, glancing down at the inhaler, which was now covered in mud.

Richie tried in vain to clean it with his fingers, but it was far too filthy, and if he stood to wash it by the lake, the others were bound to question, or else seize the moment and keep Richie away from Eddie.

"You'd fuckin kill me if I stuck this thing in your mouth," he said quietly, scoffing, "Bullshit camphor water, anyway."

He chucked it off to the side, wiping his dirty hands on his pants before cupping Eddie's face, feeling for a pulse in his neck ... there was one.

"The fuck are you waiting for, Rich, kiss him already ..." he muttered

to himself, glancing over his shoulder at the group, who were all still unaware.

"I swear, Eds," he muttered, turning back to his supposedly dead friend, "If you don't wake up, I'm so going to kick your ass for this in the afterlife."

Richie leaned in close, his hand over Eddie's as he pressed a kiss to his soft lips, his unresponsive lips ... still, he kissed him meaningfully, even though it was brief. *Just like a prince in a fairy tale, Eds. Happy?*

He pulled away, not bothering to see if the others saw him.

He sat there on his heels, watching his face, his chest, his hands, hoping to catch the slightest sign of life.

And then ...

Eddie's eyes shot open, and he gasped loudly, as if coming up for air from underwater, and it resulted in a loud coughing fit.

Richie could barely believe his eyes, convinced that if this really was a dream, he might as well be in it for as long as he could.

Eddie pulled himself upright frantically as the coughing stopped, and he scrambled as if he was trying to run from something, and wound up curling into a fetal position instead, a small whimper escaping his lips. Richie wrapped his arms around him, holding him close, tucking Eddie's head under his chin.

"You're alright, buddy, I gotcha, I gotcha," he soothed, rocking him gently as Ben and Beverly rushed over, mouths agape in shock. Bill stayed where he was, holding Audra, looking like he'd just seen a ghost.

"Richie?" Eddie managed in a hoarse whisper, gripping his arm tightly as another series of coughs surfaced, rattling his entire body.

"Come on now, Eds, I can't have been *that* bad!" Richie scolded, getting a little insulted by now, but the realization of how close he had come to losing him had started to bubble to the surface, and he

could feel waves of dread, nausea, and ... love? Nah, maybe it was just nausea.

"Eddie!" Beverly cried out finally as if suddenly tuning in to the program, her hands flying to her mouth in disbelief, "We thought you were- ... How did- ... Richie, what did you do?"

Eddie's coughs subsided as Richie rubbed his hand in circles on his back, still rocking him in his arms as he felt a blush creeping up his neck, "I ... well ..."

He looked down at the Spaghetti man, who looked up at him, eyebrows creased in worry, beady eyes questioning what he probably already knew the answer to. Damn, it was so nice to finally look into his face again and see him staring back ...

"I guess I ..." He looked over to Ben, Bev, and Bill, "I kissed him?" Richie said with a shrug, looking back to Eddie, whose face was now flushed with embarrassment, and Richie felt smug all of the sudden, "Yeah. I kissed him."

Ben and Beverly whipped around, looking towards Bill, who was already ahead of them, looking into Audra's far-off gaze. He brushed her hair back from her eyes lovingly, as he shakily pressed a deep passionate kiss upon her lips.

He pulled away after a moment, hoping to see the same results.

But there was nothing.

She remained in her catatonic state.

Bill watched her for a while before pulling her close again, arms wrapped protectively around her.

"She must've stared into the deadlights for too long," Ben suggested, "Don't worry, Bill. We'll figure this out."

Richie felt guilty within that moment, but also selfish. He couldn't think about Bill and Audra. All that mattered to him was right here in his arms, and he was determined not to lose him again. Instinctively, he clutched Eddie tighter, for fear by loosening his hold on him, he

would surely lose him forever ... Eddie didn't seem to notice, or if he did, he didn't mind, for he gripped him back, rubbing his thumb against his arm as he laid his head back against his shoulder, trying to regulate his breathing.

"Deadlights ..." Eddie echoed finally, looking around to all of them, "Pennywise ... did you ... is It *dead*?" he looked up to Richie for an answer, and he nodded.

"We were caught in the deadlights, and you ... you sacrificed yourself. Bev, she injured It, and It took off ... and then after you ... well ..."

Richie couldn't bring himself to say it, tears finally flooding his eyes as the realization hit him, and he shut them tight, looking away, hiding his face behind Eddie's head.

Eddie tentatively reached up for him, trying to gently bring him back into view by tugging lightly on the collar of his shirt, but Ben finished for him.

"After you died. You *died*, Eddie. We were sure of it ... well, all of us except Richie. After that, we went after It, and ripped Its heart out."

Eddie cringed in disgust, squeezing Richie's arm. Richie still stayed buried in Eddie's golden locks.

"Why did you think I was dead?" Eddie asked carefully after some time, and Richie finally emerged from his nest of curls. He seemed to have calmed down a bit, but his face was still red from his tears.

"You weren't breathing," Richie explained, "We saw the life leave your eyes. I thought ... I thought you were dead, but I didn't want to believe it. And they thought I was losing my mind when I was convinced you weren't."

"We're sorry, Richie ..." Beverly insisted, clasping his shoulder tight.

Richie nodded, "I know. It's alright. I don't blame you guys. It was crazy. He ..." he looked to his friend, "Eddie, you weren't breathing. But you felt warm. A-and then I felt a pulse, and your heartbeat .. but still you weren't breathing. It was strange."

"Probably Pennywise's final trick."

"But not his final curse," Bill added from afar, still cradling Audra, a far-off gaze to rival her own.

"I'm sorry, Bill ... I'm so sorry ..." Richie said weakly, so taken aback from all that's happened, so worn out and fed up, he was finally at a loss for words. Which was rare for him.

His grip loosened on Eddie, and Beverly seized the moment to wrap him up in a hug, kissing his cheek, "I'm so glad you're okay, Eddie," she whispered, fresh tears running down her cheeks.

Ben hugged him too, a sort of bear hug that almost knocked the wind out of poor Eddie.

And then Eddie made to stand, determined to walk over to Bill, but he wound up nearly falling over like a newborn calf.

"Easy, Eds, easy," Ben warned and helped him to his feet. Richie sat where they left him, his knuckles to his lips as he stared off into nothing, too numb to think let alone talk.

Richie watched as Eddie finally got his footing, and stumbled over to Bill, hugging him tightly. He felt jealous, in a way. Robbed. He wanted Eddie all to himself, but he knew that couldn't happen. Besides, they were all friends, there was no need for him to be jealous. Still ...

"Richie? You okay?"

Richie looked up and hadn't realized Ben had even approached him. He nodded shortly, grabbing up Eddie's glasses and his now filthy inhaler as he got to his feet, stumbling just as Eddie did, and Ben grabbed his arm to steady him.

"I'm sorry," was all Richie could muster.

"I'm sorry too," Ben replied, patting him on the back as he led him over to his friends.

They finally found the energy to talk about what had happened, and

talked Bill into calling an ambulance for Audra, soon as they would get back to the road. Ben offered to carry her for him, being the stronger guy of the bunch, but Bill insisted he could handle it. Ben followed close behind should Bill show any signs of struggle, for they did have to climb up a steep hill at some point.

"Hey, Richie, have you seen my-"

Richie held out Eddie's glasses before he could even finish the sentence. The younger man smiled as he took them from him graciously, putting them on.

"A-and my-?"

"What, that kiss wasn't enough for you?" Richie asked jokingly, clutching his chest, "Oh, my achy breaky heart!"

Eddie's ears burned a beet red, but he said nothing.

Richie reached into his jacket pocket and produced the inhaler.

"Aw, *Rich*, really?"

"It fell; I didn't do it on purpose. Besides, it's not real."

"It's real to me," Eddie argued, cleaning it with the edge of his jacket. Eventually, he gave up and just pocketed it instead.

"Aw, what do you need that thing for anyway when you got me? I'm real."

"You're not medicine, Richie."

"I think my kiss would beg to differ."

"Richie ..."

"Besides, that thing ain't medicine either."

"It helps me."

"C'mon, let me be your new inhaler," he half-joked, giving him a light shove with his shoulder.

"Haha, very funny, Richie."

"That wasn't a joke."

Eddie's eyes met Richie's briefly, and he looked away, shrugging up his shoulders like he usually did when he was particularly embarrassed.

Richie had to tear his eyes away from staring at Eddie so much as they walked side by side, but anytime he took a step in the opposite direction, Richie's head would snap up as if Eddie were about to just take off on him and leave forever.

"Richie?" Eddie finally spoke, after what felt like an eternity.

"Yeah?"

"Hold my hand, please?" he asked sheepishly, "I'm still feeling a little off."

"I'll say, you went through Hell and back," Richie joked, forcing a smile that soon faded. No, Eddie wouldn't wind up in Hell for being who he was, no matter what the bullies at school said in their younger years.

He took his hand in his, content just to touch him, warm, *alive*, and found that Eddie gripped it tightly this time, but he wouldn't meet his gaze as they walked.

"So did you really save me with a ... a *kiss*?"

"Yeah," Richie breathed, goosebumps running up his arms, "Crazy, huh? Just like those fairy tales you made me read to you."

"You remembered that?"

"You only had me read it like a *billion* times!" Richie exclaimed, tousling Eddie's hair with his free hand.

"You didn't have to," Eddie muttered, adjusting his glasses.

"I know. I wanted to."

Eddie looked up at Richie finally, and lost his footing on a slippery stone and tripped, and Richie caught him, deciding to walk with his arm around his waist.

"Hope you don't mind," Richie excused, "It's safer this way."

"I don't mind, Rich," Eddie responded with a smile that made Richie's stomach flutter, "I want you to."

Richie smiled back and he squeezed him lightly as they walked on, following the others up the trail. Eddie wrapped his arm around his waist as well and leaned his head on his shoulder briefly as they walked. Richie kissed him atop his head and ruffled his hair right afterward.

"Don't you ever scare me like that again, Spaghetti Man."

"How many times do I have to tell you not to call me that?"

(A/N)- Please please PLEASE let me know if you liked it! I want to write more about them.

2. Chapter 2

(A/N)- Part 2, also on Archive of our Own, surprised that this section isn't as popular on here as it is there, but I'm gonna post in both places anyway. Enjoy! Thank you so so much **Ghostsballad** for being my one and only reviewer, on both sites! (aside from kudos) I really appreciate the feedback!

They got back to Richie's car, and Eddie reluctantly removed himself from Richie once they were back on solid ground. He fully expected Richie to be driving his own car, but after they called an ambulance from Richie's car phone, Ben had suggested that he should drive. Eddie observed Richie's face the entire time, he looked pale, his gaze distant, he had changed so much during the walk up. Perhaps he was finally processing all that's happened, and what could have happened.

Eddie felt guilty, for he had basically been asleep through all of the grief his friend experienced. All because of him.

He reached out and clasped Richie's hand, breaking him out of his thoughts. He felt like a magnet, unable to stand even five minutes without physical contact.

His taller friend looked over at him, flashing his usual smile as he swung their hands between him.

"You doin' alright, Eds?"

"Yes, Richie, I'm fine ..." Eddie assured with a soft smile that soon faded, his eyebrows knitted in concern, "Are you okay?"

Richie nodded, running his free hand through his hair as he squeezed Eddie's hand, and Eddie moved closer.

"Never better, you know ... despite ... *everything*."

Eddie wanted to ask him what was really wrong, really press him, but he felt that Richie didn't wanna confess in front of everyone, so he let

it be, contending to brushing his thumb along the back of his hand.

He couldn't remember ever being so affectionate with his friend before, despite how close they'd been ... Richie was usually so rough with him, pulling him into a headlock and ruffling his hair while Eddie protested, all in good fun ... but this was different.

Richie had gone soft on him, and although he liked it, it also worried him.

It worried him because he knew that it meant Richie must have been scared out of his wits, and was obviously still scared.

A police siren made a woop-woop noise, and it made Richie jump and they looked to see a cop car arrive, flashing its lights.

Richie groaned in annoyance, eyeing Bill. It was then Eddie realized that it must be about Henry Bowers' body they left in their hotel room.

"I'll handle this," Ben muttered, "Richie, don't go running your mouth ..."

Eddie felt protective of him within that moment, almost hurt that Ben would tell him off like that. But it was understandable, knowing how Richie could be ... And there he was, ignited to say something, until Eddie squeezed his hand, pulling him back.

All it took was one look into Eddie's eyes, and Richie backed down.

To their surprise, the cops weren't there to arrest them.

They were there to check if they were okay, as Henry Bowers was an escaped mental patient, after all. Ben explained everything, but lied a bit as it would seem weird that he was aware of Bowers's dead body and had just left it there without going to the cops in the first place. He went with the story that their friend Mike had been attacked, and that they rushed him to the hospital without giving Bowers a second thought, as he had accidentally killed himself in the scuffle.

What they were doing in the Barrens though ...

Bill covered for them, and acted as if his wife had wandered down there herself, and that they went to find her. Partly true, at least. They couldn't very well tell the cops that they went there with intent to hunt down and kill an evil clown from their childhood, after all.

Eddie zoned out, concentrating solely on the feeling of Richie's skin beneath his as he rubbed his thumb comfortingly along the back of his hand as if he were a worry stone.

A kiss on his forehead broke him out of his thoughts, and he looked up to meet Richie's eyes.

"Come on, we're gonna get a couple rooms for the night, hunker down until we know Bill's okay."

Eddie nodded, and Richie wrapped an arm around him as they walked back to the car, opening the door for Eddie and sliding in after him.

Eddie couldn't stand the space between them on the seats, and he reached for Richie, who promptly slid over to him to sit on the middle seat.

"Thanks, Richie ..." Eddie said weakly with a smile as he leaned back into his shoulder, and without skipping a beat, Richie wrapped his arm around him, his head against his. He pressed a firm kiss to the top of his head, and gave his arm a reassuring squeeze.

"Glad you're back, Eddie Spaghetti," he said with a light shake before returning his arm to rest along the back seat.

"Richie —..."

"I know, I know, I'll stop calling you that."

"N-no, it's not that ... well, yes, that too," he said with a laugh, turning his head against his collarbone, "It's just ..." Eddie looked to Ben and Bev, who were preoccupied with their own conversation, and weren't listening anyway and probably would think nothing of it if they did, but he still lowered his voice, "Can you ... hold me? Just not so tight please? I'm not going anywhere, promise."

Richie smiled, a smile which softly faded as he put his arm around his shoulders again.

Eddie grasped his hand, pulling it across his chest and holding it there as if he were a seatbelt.

"Thanks, Richie," Eddie breathed, laying back against his shoulder again, closing his eyes. Richie rubbed his thumb over his knuckles, and Eddie dozed off in his arms as they drove off.

Beverly and Ben went to go rest in the hotel room they were sharing. Richie had gotten them a rental car, which was parked beside his own car. He planned to return to Beverly Hills, and wanted to make sure they were taken care of before he left. He didn't tell them this though, especially not Eddie, hoping that he could slip away in the night. Richie's plan was that he was going to go off to buy a pack of smokes, but he wouldn't come back. Eddie was smarter than that though, and he gave Richie a copy of his room key, "If I'm asleep by the time you get back ..." he tried not to scare him off by reminding him that this room had two beds, but Richie still remained quiet, fiddling with the card key as he leaned against his convertible.

"I can come with you ..." Eddie offered feebly with a pleading smile.

"Nah, I won't be long," Richie brushed off, "I just need a ride to clear my head ..."

Eddie nodded, looking away as he awkwardly stuck his hands in his denim jacket pockets, "Yeah, sure, I understand," he walked towards his room door, "I ... guess I'll see you later, then ..."

"Eds?" Richie called back, and Eddie stopped in his tracks, looking over at his friend.

"Do you remember anything? After you ...?"

Richie still couldn't bring himself to say it, his eyes glassing over at the mere thought of it.

Eddie turned back, walking over towards him until they were toe-to-toe again.

"No, nothing ... I thought I just passed out from everything that was going on ... everything just went black."

Richie idly played with a loose thread on his jacket, "And when you woke up?"

"When I woke up, it was like a burst of light ... like waking up suddenly from a bad dream, and yet I felt so exhausted like someone woke me up in the middle of a nap, like I didn't want to wake up, but I ... I *had* to."

"So ... you don't remember anything in-between?"

Eddie shook his head, "Nothing ... well, except ... I could hear you. I felt you nearby. I couldn't make out what you were saying or ... or what you did, but ... I don't know ... it was comforting. I didn't feel so afraid."

Richie smiled affectionately, but it soon faded, "So ... nothing ... specific?"

"If you're trying to ask what I think you're trying to ask, Richie, the answer is no ..." Eddie said sincerely, looking up into his best friend's eyes, "No, I don't remember you kissing me."

Richie shrugged carelessly, looking away, "Don't worry about it, it wasn't exactly memorable ..."

"It saved my life."

"It was brief. I wasn't even sure it would work ..."

"Richie?"

"Yeah?"

Richie finally met Eddie's eyes, and Eddie looked away, licking his lips nervously, "Could you, uh ... could you do it again? I-I mean, could you s-show me?"

Eddie finally looked up at him, eyebrows creased with worry and uncertainty, his eyes big and round behind his glasses.

"Hey, Bill's supposed to be the one with the stutter, not you," Richie said with a light chuckle.

"Please, Rich?" Eddie asked again, stepping closer, his fingers nervously clutching the fabric on the arms of his jacket.

Richie obliged, reaching his hand up and cupping Eddie's face, causing him to gasp slightly at the touch, but he did not break eye contact.

"This was the third pulse I felt for, first was your wrist, second was your heart ... it was faint ... I thought my mind was playing tricks on me because you weren't breathing ... so I took a chance and ..."

Richie placed a kiss on Eddie's lips, brief as he did when he had brought him back to life, only this time, Eddie jumped slightly, as if in surprise, and Richie pulled away, if only to prove a point.

"That was all," he said with a small shrug.

Eddie laughed, rubbing his upper lip, "You sure it wasn't your mustache that woke me up? That really tickles."

"Alright, that's enough, I'm leaving," Richie said flatly in annoyance, pulling away from Spaghetti Man, who in turn grasped him tight.

"No, no, I'm *kidding*, Richie, don't go," Eddie said, laughing, and his laughter subsided when he found himself grabbing hold of Richie's jacket collar, his smile fading as he looked to his lips, and back up into his eyes, "*Please ... don't go.*"

Richie smiled, "What, me *and* my mustache?"

Eddie grinned back and reached up, carefully touching the nape of Richie's neck and running his fingers through his hair ... and then he retracted his hand, looking ashamed as he looked over Richie's shoulder.

Richie followed his gaze and saw a couple of people that were standing by the doors to the lobby, and they quickly looked away when they met Richie's eyes.

"I'm sorry, Rich, I'm no good at this ..."

"Could've fooled me," Richie retorted, turning back to him and taking both his hands and lacing his fingers through his, "You're a natural."

"*Beep beep*, Richie," Eddie chastised, looking away.

"I'm sorry ..." Richie apologized, swinging their hands between them before gently leading Eddie closer to him, so that he had Richie pinned up against his car. Eddie's face looked flushed, as he looked up into his eyes, and held his gaze.

"This is a small town, Richie," Eddie reminded, peeking over his shoulder at the couple, who must've gone inside, for Eddie kissed Richie's shoulder briefly before leaning his forehead against him, "We gotta be careful."

"We faced It," Richie reminded, "We can face anyone."

"Doesn't mean we should," Eddie countered, wrapping his arms around him, but keeping his cheek on his shoulder, watching the lobby doors.

"I'll stay the night," Richie said finally.

"So you *were* going to leave!" Eddie protested, pulling away, poking him in the chest with his finger half-jokingly, but then his eyes betrayed him, and he choked back his tears as he said with a humorless laugh, "What, did you wanna see me die all over again?"

"Don't joke like that," Richie shook his head, gathering him in his arms.

"It's *not* a joke," Eddie mumbled through his tears, wetting Richie's jacket in the process as he breathed against him, "What the *hell* am I supposed to do without you now?"

Richie hugged him tighter, rubbing his back in small circles before pushing himself off of the car, arms still wrapped around him, "Come on," Richie insisted, leading him to his room ... *their* room.

"What about your cigarettes?"

"Oh, I quit." Richie admitted with a smug grin.

"Since when?"

"Since Mike called. I mean, I knew I'd need it, dealing with Pennywise," he said regrettably, "But I thought of you and your asthma, so ... I quit."

Eddie blushed fiercely, rubbing the back of his neck in embarrassment, "Not real asthma,"

"Still," Richie said, "I remember how you felt about them."

Eddie smiled softly to himself, and Richie mussed up his hair lovingly before fishing into his pockets for his card key.

Eddie recalled the night they saw that Werewolf movie.

He could barely stand to watch it, all the screaming, the fake blood ... he thought the werewolf was going to leap out of the screen and get him. And this was before he'd ever encountered It, so he was far more terrified than usual. He couldn't stop squirming.

From the corner of his eye, he saw Beverly recoil in fear, and hide her face into Ben's arm.

He glanced over, and met Richie's eyes, and he smiled at him as he chewed his popcorn, and Eddie smiled back reassuringly, looking back to the screen. He hoped Richie hadn't seen he was afraid. Richie was never afraid.

He didn't remember too clearly, but a particularly scary scene came on, and he put his feet up on the ledge in an attempt to hide himself behind his knees, for his popcorn on the ledge wasn't doing much to hide the screen from view.. He thought about how Beverly was coping, and wondered if it would be out of line for him to do the same with Richie.

Eddie held his breath, hoping that if he just turned against Richie's shoulder real quick, at the right moment, Richie wouldn't blame him. He couldn't imagine Richie getting mad at him for it, but then he

never attempted to get close like that before. He didn't wanna make things weird ... but if there was ever a moment to seize where it wouldn't be appropriate in the least?

Eddie looked over at Richie again, and Richie met his eyes immediately, and Eddie fidgeted, his foot slipped on the barrier, and knocked over his popcorn, sending his popcorn flying over the edge and onto Henry Bowers and his gang who were seated below.

And now here they were, 27 years later, in a hotel room, sitting in bed above the covers, watching that same Werewolf movie.

"Richie, do we really have to?" Eddie whined in protest, already sinking down against the bedpost in fear.

"Hey, I'm afraid of werewolves more than you; this is something we have to face. Coping process."

"I'd rather cope in some other way, thanks."

Eddie took off his glasses and pocketed them, hoping that it would at least prevent him from seeing it too clearly.

Richie wrapped an arm around him, and his 11 year old self was screaming. Sure, Richie had held him before, but remembering how much he'd wanted this ...

Eddie turned and buried his face into Richie's side, grabbing at his shirt.

"Eds, the movie hasn't even started yet," Richie pointed out with a chuckle, rubbing his arm.

Eddie hid himself against him further, mumbling against his stomach.

"What was that?" Richie asked, gripping his shoulder, and Eddie pressed his forehead against him, turning his face to the side so he could speak more clearly.

"I've wanted to do this for 27 years."

"What, watch the movie again?" Richie asked, "I just picked it up at a

Blockbuster ..."

"Beep, beep, Richie," Eddie pleaded quietly, staring at his fingers in concentration as he played with the end of Richie's shirt.

Richie sighed deeply and turned off the film, which had barely even begun the opening credits, and he slid down on the bed so that he was at eye level with his friend, plopping his head on the pillows with a sigh.

"What are you trying to say, Eds?"

"That it was your fault."

"What was?"

"That night at the movie theater, the popcorn, Bowers ..."

Richie laughed, "Your memory must be failing you, Spaghetti Man."

"No," Eddie corrected, shaking his head lightly as he played with the collar of Richie's shirt, "I was distracted, I ... I wanted to ... hold you ..." he could feel a blush creeping up his neck and he lowered his gaze in shame, "I was trying to, without looking too obvious, you know ... I figured it would be okay, because it was a scary movie. But then you looked at me, and I guess I got nervous, and my foot slipped."

"What *are* you trying to say, Eds?" Richie asked playfully with a mischievous grin, "That you *lo-*"

Eddie grabbed Richie by the collar of his shirt and cut him off mid-sentence with a rough kiss against his lips, and held him there for a moment, exhaling sharply through his nose. He pulled away, breathing heavily, eyes wide with fear as he looked into Richie's eyes.

Richie stared back, mirroring Eddie's reaction, except there were tears forming in his eyes.

Eddie reached up carefully, brushing his thumb against his cheekbone, "Are you okay, Richie? You can tell me ... if this isn't what you want—"

"It *is*," Richie assured, holding his hand over Eddie's, "I want this. I want you ... it's just ... damn it, Eds, you almost *died*. I thought you were dead. I'm sorry I tried to leave earlier, I just ... I don't know. I guess I'm scared. I almost lost you, I'm gonna lose you again, you've got your career and I've got mine ... I don't wanna lose you again, Eds, I *can't* lose you again ..."

Eddie's eyes were brimming with tears now too, and he pressed his forehead to Richie's.

"Hey, hey. We'll figure this out. I'm here now. I'm not going anywhere, okay?" Eddie reassured, gripping his shirt tight, "I'm here."

Richie brought his hand up, running his hand through Eddie's hair gently, and twirled one of his curls around his finger, breathing shakily, "I'm scared, Eds. What if I wake up tomorrow and this has all been a dream? What if you're ... what if you really didn't make it?"

Eddie moved closer, kissing his friend softly on the forehead, "I'm here," he breathed, pressing another kiss on his nose, "I'm real ..."

He cupped his face in his hand, staring into his dark green eyes seriously, allowing a small smile to grace his lips, "... and I love you."

Eddie kissed Richie softly on the lips, and Richie kissed back, softly and carefully at first, and then it soon deepened, Richie's hands running through his blonde curls, causing a moan to escape the smaller man's lips. He broke free for air, and Richie kissed along his neck, pulling him closer, if that was even possible.

"I meant what I said, Richie," Eddie reminded, "I'm a ... I've never been with anyone. I don't know ... what to do, I'm ... I'm *terrified*."

"Hey, don't feel pressured, okay?" Richie assured, gripping the back of his neck comfortingly, "I'm happy just being with you. Okay?" He asked, looking him square in the eyes, "We don't have to rush this."

"It's been 27 years, Richie," Eddie laughed humorlessly, "How's that for not rushing?"

"And I'll wait 27 more, if that's what it takes."

"Then you're a fool."

"A fool for you."

Eddie punched his shoulder playfully, catching his lips in his once more before snuggling down into the bed, resting his head in the crook of his neck.

"I love you, Eddie Kaspbrak," Richie murmured, kissing him atop his head.

"I love you too, Richie Tozier," Eddie replied with a yawn, and they soon fell asleep in each other's arms.